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AUTHOR Parkay, Forrest W.; Hoover, Nora
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ABSTRACT

A description is given of a client-based approach to staff development that emphasizes ongoing professional growth and learning for teachers. The underlying assumptions of the program are that teachers possess important clinical expertise, and that professional learning is an adaptive, heuristic process that is long-term and nonlinear. The program is tied to school-site program building efforts since professional learning is critically influenced by organizational factors in the school site and district. The model for this approach to staff development provides for: (1) an extensive, thorough diagnosis of present instructional problems in the school setting; (2) a careful selection from among alternative methods and materials; (3) extensive teacher involvement, from early planning and diagnostic stages to final implementation; (4) open, direct channels for communication between all participants; and (5) a flexible time-line for implementation. A description is given of how the client-based model of staff development was implemented recently in the design and delivery of a reading inservice program for elementary teachers in a medium-sized Florida city. This professional development model gives priority to improving teachers' decision making skills and enhancing their professional autonomy. It also enables teachers, administrators, parents, and university consultants to become active partners in the school improvement process. (JD)

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CLIENT-BASED STAFF DEVELOPMENT:

BUILDING PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Forrest W. Parkay
Nora Hoover

College of Education
University of Florida

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Staff development programs which attempt to bring about meaningful change at the school site are often short-lived and, for a number of complex reasons, fail to promote teacher growth. This failure appears to be linked to three factors: (1) a lack of teacher control which often results in staff development programs whose goals are not in keeping with teachers' intentions and beliefs, (2) the difficulty of effecting significant long-term changes in teachers' classroom behavior, and (3) the problem of furnishing evidence that such change has actually occurred.

In response to these problems, the authors have developed a client-based approach to staff development which emphasizes ongoing professional growth and learning. Currently, this approach is being utilized in school improvement efforts at several schools throughout Florida.

Characteristics of Effective Staff Development Programs

The client-based approach was developed in light of previous studies of staff development and school change (Rubin, 1975; Dillon-Peterson, 1981; Della-Dora and Blanchard, 1979; Lawrence, 1974; McLaughlin and Marsh, 1978, for example). These studies confirm that the mere presentation of teacher effectiveness research findings at "one-shot", didactically structured staff development workshops do not convince teachers to use research as a basis for behavioral change. Furthermore, as many school improvement efforts have demonstrated, research can seldom be applied, unmodified, to the complex problems that beset any school; " . . . such information has to be applied judiciously and in a decision-making format if it is to have a positive effect on American education" (Good, 1984).

Staff development must focus on professional growth and learning--not on the elimination of imagined teacher deficiencies. The authors' client-

based approach, therefore, incorporates several assumptions about professional learning which have emerged from studies of the characteristics of effective staff development. Client-based staff development, for example, is based on the findings of the Rand study (McLaughlin and Marsh, 1978):

1. Teachers possess important clinical expertise.

2. Professional learning is an adaptive, heuristic process.

3. Professional learning is a long-term, nonlinear process.

4. Professional learning must be tied to school-site program building efforts.

5. Professional learning is critically influenced by organizational factors in the school site and the district.

The approach is also based on the earlier Florida State Department of Education's comprehensive study of effective staff development programs (Lawrence, 1974). That study concluded that effective staff development programs possess the following characteristics:

1. Teachers participate as helpers to each other and to the planners of staff development activities.

2. Differentiated training experiences are provided for different teachers; i. e., the program is "individualized."

3. Teachers assume an active role in (A) constructing and generating materials and ideas and (B) trying out new behaviors.

4. Teachers share with one another and provide mutual assistance.

5. Teachers are allowed to choose goals and activities for themselves.

Finally, client-based staff development recognizes that teachers must acquire not only knowledge about effective practices but also an understanding of how and when to implement those practices. And as how and when decisions have to be made anew by each teacher in his or her particular setting, the effective staff development program helps teachers improve their decision-making, problem-solving skills.

The Client-Based Staff Development Model

Figure 1 presents a model for the client-based approach to staff development. The model's steps provide for: (1) an extensive, thorough diagnosis of present instructional problems in the school setting, (2) a careful selection from among alternative methods and materials, (3) extensive teacher involvement, from early planning and diagnostic stages to final implementation, (4) open, direct channels for two way, face-to-face communication, and (5) a flexible time-line for implementation.

Insert Figure 1 here.

The client-based approach is oriented toward inquiry rather than toward deterministic, pre-formulated solutions. The emphasis is on change as an emergent process--a process of exploration designed to enable the individual school to identify and to meet its, sometimes shifting, goals. As Schaefer (1967, p. 5) has urged, the client-based approach seeks to help

schools become "centers of inquiry" and teachers full partners in the pursuit of effective school change:

> Why should our schools not be staffed, gradually if you will, by scholar-teachers in command of the conceptual tools and methods of inquiry requisite to investigating the learning process as it operates in their own classrooms? Why should our schools not nurture the continuing wisdom and power of such scholar teachers?

The model is also adaptive because all stages emphasize environmental feedback. The advantages of such a model are many. Planning is flexible and maintains essential contact with the reality of the situation, and implementation occurs as a logical consequence of diagnostic and testing phases.

In general, the model specifies that a particular innovative goal is shaped as a result of feedback from all involved. If modification of a certain stage is deemed necessary, all previous stages are resurveyed to ensure that the total change process responds to valid, relevant input. By thus "recycling" the stages of the model as many times as necessary, the effectiveness and appropriateness of the proposed innovative solution are enhanced.

Diagnostic Stages

The diagnostic stages of the model begin with a clarification of current instructional problems. These problems are viewed from various vantage points: administrative, teacher, pupil, parent, and unbiased outside observer.

Testing Stages

In general, the testing stages are hypothetical and involve the

formulation of "if . . . then" statements which require participants to draw from their present knowledge of the situation and envision the outcomes of various proposals. On the basis of these scenarios, decisions for action are made which generate the need for new, more comprehensive and detailed scenarios. As participants move toward a particular "solution," they acquire new attitides, beliefs, and competencies which further enhance the appropriateness of the final outcome. At the end of the testing stages, a plan for implementation (the product of group inquiry) is formulated.

Implementation Stages

As various strategies are implemented, the flexibility of earlier planning stages is maintained. Testing also continues. Each action is followed by reflection and an appraisal of feedback. If necessary, the implementation plan, the time-line, or the innovative approach itself are modified.

Putting the Model to Work: A Case Study

What follows is a description of how the client-based model of staff development was implemented recently in the design and delivery of a reading inservice program for elementary teachers in a medium-sized Florida city.

Since the mid-seventies, staff development in reading for teachers in this school district had followed traditional lines. A university consultant would prepare a menu of workshop topics agreeable to district administrators. Training in these areas was then delivered year after year to teachers in need of inservice points for recertification. Program

evaluation was limited to teachers' opinions of the sessions on evaluation forms. No systematic attempt was made to involve teachers in the design of the program, to meet the changing professional needs of participating teachers, or to document the impact of staff development efforts on classroom practice.

In 1983, however, new state legislation requiring that inservice programs demonstrate increased skill among participants provided an impetus for the redesign of the existing program. As a result, one of the authors, acting as a consultant, worked closely with district administrators and teachers to implement a client-based program to improve the teaching of reading. The diagnostic, testing, and implementation phases of that change process are described in the following.

Diagnostic Stages

The first step in the diagnostic phase was a discussion between the consultant, a professor of reading, and the district administrator responsible for staff development. At that initial meeting, two tasks were accomplished: state requirements were reviewed, and agreement was reached on the procedures to be followed in the design and implementation of the new inservice program. A client-based approach which would provide teachers the opportunity to participate in the formulation of goals, objectives, and evaluation procedures was selected as the optimum change strategy.

The second step in the diagnostic phase was a fall planning meeting with the clients to be served--the elementary classroom teachers. The district demonstrated its support for the new staff development effort by awarding inservice points to teachers who attended this meeting.

From the start, this planning meeting was characterized by personal

involvement and learning as well as group decision making. The teachers initially wished to discuss the need for change. Some teachers were uncertain or confused about why the traditional reading inservice program was not being offered as usual. Rumors concerning the new state mandated standards for inservice had generated some degree of resentment as well as anxiety about pre- and post-tests to assess participants' learning. Thus, the first order of business was to respond to these affective concerns by providing information and the opportunity to discuss the situation.

Next, the consultant facilitated the process of examining the teachers' attitudes toward inservice itself. In the problem-solving small group discussions which followed, teachers generated possible solutions for the ills which often beset staff development programs. This critical component of the diagnostic phase, the consideration of strategies to remediate identified needs, was conducted with the full participation of all the clients to be served by the inservice program that year.

Since additional planning meetings involving 50 to 70 teachers were not feasible, a steering committee comprised of teachers from each quadrant of the school district was elected. Throughout the fall, the four teacher representatives met regularly with the consultant and the district's reading supervisor to design the new staff development program.

Testing Stages

With the convening of the steering committee, the testing phases began. The committee first identified and then carried out several strategies for securing teacher input into the design of the new program. A Teacher Survey was sent to every grade level team in each elementary school in the district; (a 100 percent return rate for these surveys was achieved). Informal discussions involving all teachers, not just those in

need of inservice credit that year, were held at schools in the district. Finally, suggestion boxes were placed in all the schools.

Steering committee deliberations continued for an entire semester. Every aspect of the staff development program was considered: goals, workshop topics, scheduling, evaluation procedures, and so on. The group's efforts were energized by the knowledge that the committee enjoyed the full support of the district administrator for staff development. As a result, the committee's recommendations, based on sound and comprehensive data gathered from within the district, were implemented during the next semester.

As the staff development process continued to unfold, the client base expanded to include all elementary teachers within the district who one day might need inservice training in reading. These teachers were represented on the steering committee by an additional four teachers. Later, during the implementation phases, the client base changed once again to include only those teachers enrolled in the inservice program. As these changes occurred, however, the consultant followed the model's many feedback loops and personalized instruction for participating teachers.

Implementation Stages

During the implementation phases, the consultant assumed the role previously held by the steering committee and solicited teacher input and feedback on program operation. For example, following an inservice session on the classroom management of reading instruction, each teacher was asked to identify one aspect of management for which he or she wished additional information and to identify one suggestion provided during the inservice which he or she would implement. At the next meeting, then, each participant received a written response from the consultant and, in turn,

provided the consultant with a written account of his or her implementation efforts.

Following a training session on teacher effectiveness research as it relates to reading group instruction, participants were asked to assess their own instruction using a research-based instrument. Pre- and post-audio tapes of reading groups were made in order to determine teacher progress in providing improved instruction as a result of inservice training and to inform the consultant of areas still in need of remediation.

Program Evaluation

The client-based program described here was evaluated through a variety of methods recommended by the steering committee. Pre- and post-audio tapes of classroom instruction, as mentioned, furnished evidence of the impact the inservice program had on instruction. Materials produced and used in classrooms (lesson plans, teaching games, direct instruction modules, and the like) provided documentation of improved classroom practice. Pre- and post-tests covering the content communicated in the program substantiated cognitive gains made by participating teachers. Finally, subjective measures such as observations by the consultant and district personnel assessed the affective and attitudinal responses of participants. The results of all these evaluation measures were fed back into the planning process, thus enabling the program to remain continually updated and responsive to client needs and concerns.

Conclusion

The client-based approach to staff development gives priority to the process of improving teachers' decision making skills and enhancing their professional autonomy. Moreover, the strategy enables classroom teachers,

special teachers, administrators, parents, and university consultants to become active partners in the school improvement process.

Given the fact that teaching methods are individual matters which teachers must explore and discover for themselves, the client-based approach can provide participants with (1) the opportunity to learn about research-proven techniques and materials, (2) the opportunity to become meaningfully involved in determining the direction of their inservice education, and (3) the encouragement and support needed to reflect on what they do as teachers and why they do it.

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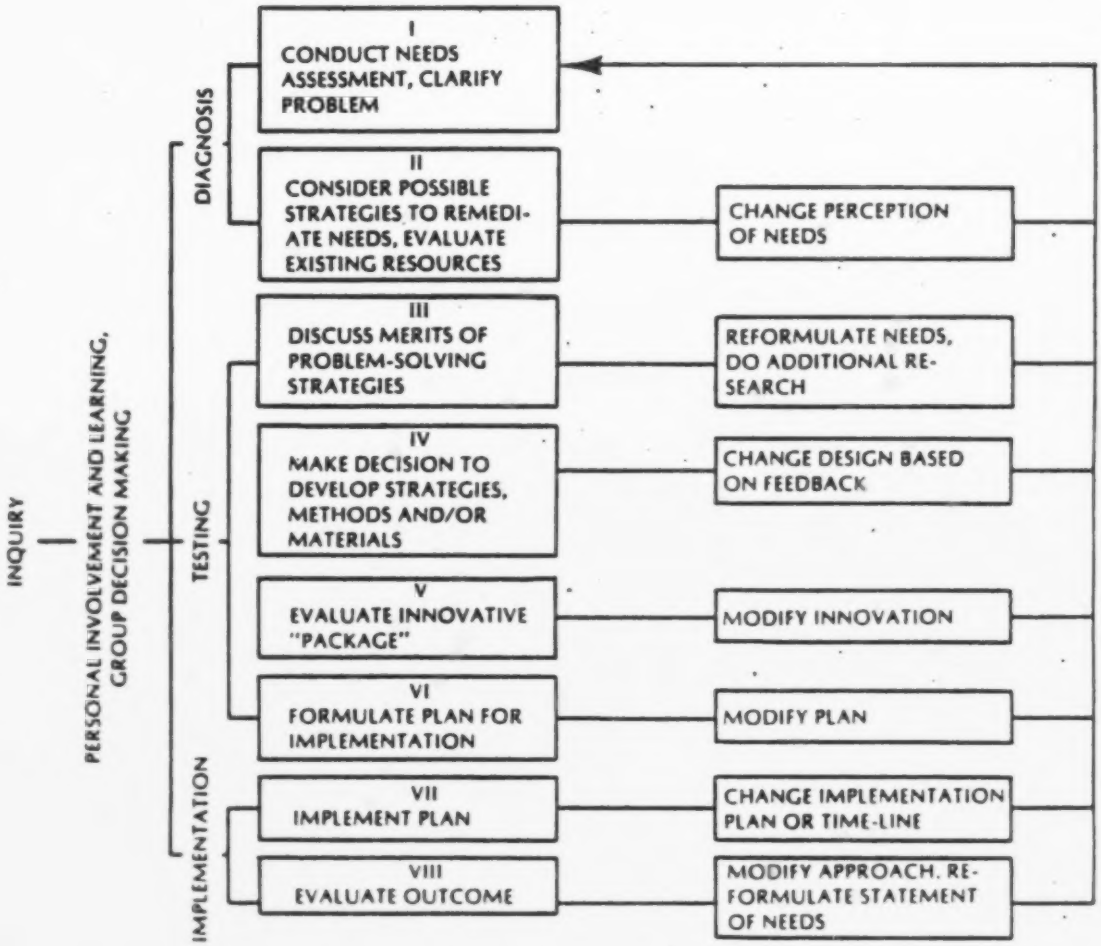

FIGURE 1

THE CLIENT-BASED STAFF DEVELOPMENT MODEL